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No. 391

A Trick of the Trade

AN EPISODE IN ONE ACT

BY

ALICE K. BROWER

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CHARACTERS

THE GIRL.
THE MATINEE HERO.

A Trick Of The Trade

SCENE. *A comfortably furnished living-room in an uptown apartment. There is a couch at centre-back, piano left stage back, entrance door left stage front, open fireplace, centre-right, tea-table set for afternoon tea, right front, easy chairs and table centre of room, with magazines and a telephone. Good pictures on the walls and clock on the mantel, which points to a quarter to four.*

THE GIRL *wears a dainty afternoon dress*—THE MAN *conventional, well-cut clothes.*

THE GIRL *is discovered on the couch, reading a magazine. She glances at the clock two or three times, then throws the magazine on the* C. *table and goes to a window. Then to the mantel and takes down a photograph of a young man and looks at it. She turns on the current under the tea-kettle, straightens the pillows on the couch, again glances at the clock, turns off the heat under the kettle, and goes to the piano where she plays and sings a few bars of a song, breaking off abruptly and whirling around on the piano stool. She goes to the* C. *table and is re-arranging a bowl of flowers when a bell is heard, and in a moment the* MATINEE HERO *enters the room and stands just inside of the doorway.* THE GIRL *turns with assumed surprise and holds out her hand.*

THE GIRL. So you really have come! Even after your note, I couldn't bring myself to believe you'd do it! *(She motions him to a chair on the* L. *and sits opposite, on the other side of the table)*

THE MAN. I get many notes like yours, but this is the first time I've ever done more than glance at them and tear them up.

THE GIRL. *(Smiling)* What was there about mine that made you not only answer it, but accept my invitation to tea?

THE MAN. Curiosity, perhaps, and maybe because your note was unusually clever. I wanted to see, for once, what a girl who would write to a man she didn't know was like.

THE GIRL. Have you made up your mind?

THE MAN. It's too soon to make decisions. But tell me, why did you write to me?

THE GIRL. *(Clasping her hands around her knees)* I've seen you act so many times, it almost seems as if I knew you. I've even waited at the stage door for a glimpse of you, and once you passed me on the street!

THE MAN. Why didn't you drop your handkerchief or faint? They always do in books!

THE GIRL. I couldn't be as silly as that! And, anyway, I didn't think of it!

THE MAN. *(Laughing)* I guess that's the answer!

THE GIRL. The other afternoon I saw you for the tenth time this season, and I made up my mind I'd write to you and ask you to tea, for I felt I must tell you what I thought of you.

THE MAN. What would your family say to all this?

THE GIRL. Oh, I haven't much of a family and I chose a day when the coast would be clear!

THE MAN. What would you have done if I

hadn't answered your note? Would you have tried again?

THE GIRL. I don't know just what I should have done; but you answered so soon I didn't have time to think. I can't imagine now why you chose to be so nice to me instead of all the other girls.

THE MAN. Your note was rather unusual, you know, and your address was such a good one. From the amount of money you must have spent in your short life, just to see me across the footlights, I felt I owed you some return. A cup of tea before a cosy fire, with a pretty girl to pour it for me, was tempting, I confess. If you had asked me to meet you at a hotel tea room, I'd never have come!

THE GIRL. What made you think I'd be pretty?

THE MAN. Aren't all Matinee Girls good-looking? Anyway, you are, you know. *(*THE GIRL *rises and goes to the tea-table and once more turns on the current under the kettle, while* THE MAN *glances at a magazine on the table)* Don't you like me to tell you you're pretty?

THE GIRL. *(Fussing with the teacups)* Of course I do, if you really mean it.

THE MAN. *(Coming near her)* I never say what I don't mean nor do what I don't want to.

THE GIRL. You're a lucky man if you can always have things your own way.

THE MAN. You had yours, to-day.

THE GIRL. *(Glancing at him)* More than I really hoped for!

THE MAN. Am I all that you dreamed?

THE GIRL. *(Sitting at the tea-table)* It's a dream come true!

THE MAN. *(Sitting opposite her)* Just what *do* you think of me, now I am a reality?

THE GIRL. *(Pouring out a cup of tea and handing it to him)* Aren't you conceited enough now?

THE MAN. If I am, it's because girls like you have made me think a lot of myself. You throng to see me and fall in love with me all over again, in each new rôle. You squander money on my pictures, and then write me letters! I'm human and it's hard to keep a level head under the circumstances.

THE GIRL. But you wouldn't draw such a large salary if we didn't make you so popular!

THE MAN. Quite right, young woman! We would not have you otherwise! But come, you haven't told me if I come up to your ideal!

THE GIRL. You haven't told me what you think of me! Ladies first!

THE MAN. I'll tell you when I've finished my tea. May I smoke?

THE GIRL. *(Handing him a box of cigarettes)* Of course you can!

THE MAN. *(Putting the box on the table)* Thank you; now begin on your impressions of me.

THE GIRL. I'm embarrassed! I know what I think of you when I'm alone, but when I see you before me in flesh and blood, drinking the tea I've made, out of my own cups, I can't say a thing!

THE MAN. That's not fair play! I intend to be very frank when my turn comes and I deserve to hear something pretty nice from you! Think of all the letters I received the other day and yours alone was the only one I answered, while the others went up in smoke. And here I am, doing what I never have done before and never will again!

THE GIRL. *(Rising and getting a box of matches from the mantel)* What you never will again? Then you won't come here for some tea another day?

THE MAN. *(As she holds a match to his cigarette)* I'll leave that to you to decide. Come! I'm

getting impatient! *(*THE GIRL *goes to the* R. *of the centre-table and* THE MAN *turns round in his chair and faces her)*

THE GIRL. I've seen you play so many parts, in costumes of so many periods. *Then* you were acting and it's hard to believe you aren't "in character" now. *(*THE MAN *looks interested)* You aren't quite as good looking when you're just yourself, and you seem older. You're really quite sensible, while I hoped you'd be frivolous. But, on the whole, I like you just as much as I knew I should and I don't want to think it must all end to-day. I did an unconventional thing and you accepted it: can't we make it the beginning of a friendship?

THE MAN. *(Rising and walking to the fire, where he stands with his back to it)* I've accepted your invitation and your hospitality, but I came here to-day with a purpose and I'm going to carry it out, even if it seems—well, wait and see! You asked me why I came and I told you the truth but not all of it. As you know, I received a dozen letters when I did yours, all from girls I have never seen. Yours was clever, you didn't gush, you stated plain facts. You admired me, wanted to know me and asked me to come to your home. When I reread your note I made up my mind to come, for I felt I could talk here as I couldn't elsewhere and I knew at heart you were a nice girl. And so I came to tell you what we actors think of a girl who does the thing you did. *(*THE GIRL *begins to look uncomfortable)* I know this is hard medicine, and when you told me a few moments ago you couldn't decide whether I was acting or not, you were right. I've been "in character" ever since I came here, playing the conceited puppet who fell for the flattery of a foolish girl! One who should have known better, I've discovered, for this room shows your bringing

up. You are not a half-educated child, old before your time, fed on cheap novels and cheaper conversation. The very atmosphere of this room is one of culture, yet you do a thing one might expect of a girl who lived in a three-room flat in Harlem. What would you do if your mother should happen in? How would you explain me? I thought all this out before I came, and am ready for any emergency. You are lucky there hasn't been any. *(*THE GIRL *rests her head on her arms, on the table)* I am a brute, I know, but did you really think I was the kind of a man who would want to keep up an acquaintance begun as this one was? I know many women and I don't care to count among my friends a girl who would do what you have. *(He walks to the table)* I don't ask you to forgive me, I only beg you to stick to the conventions you were brought up to follow and not to fall from your class. If all I have said has had any effect on you, I've done what I meant to do when I said I'd come. *(He goes to the door)* You asked me if I would come again —I think you've had your answer! Good-bye! *(He pauses in the doorway and looks at her—she is crying. He takes a step toward her, then shakes his head and goes out of the door. When there is the sound of the outer door closing,* THE GIRL *raises her head from her arms. She is laughing. She reaches for the telephone)*

THE GIRL. Greeley 641—Morning *Courier?*—Dramatic Editor, please.—That you, Mr. Clifford? Miss Morrison speaking. Yes, I got my story—not what I expected but much better—never would have given it all in an ordinary interview—might lose his popularity—Advice to Matinee Girls! *Believe me!* Do I get a raise in salary?

CURTAIN

JUST PUBLISHED

Nothing But the Truth

A Farcical Comedy in Three Acts

By

James Montgomery

Cast of Characters

Bob Bennett
B. M. Ralston
Clarence Van Dusen
Bishop Doran
Dick Donnelly
Gwen
Mrs. Ralston
Ethel
Mable
Sable
Martha

SCENES

ACT 1. A Broker's Office
ACT 2. Parlor of a Country Home
ACT 3. " " "

TIME: The Present

"Nothing But the Truth" is built upon the simple idea of its hero speaking nothing but the absolute truth for a stated period. He bets a friend ten thousand dollars that he can do it, and boldly tackles truth to win the money. For a very short time the task is placidly easy, but Truth routs out old man Trouble and then things begin to happen. Trouble doesn't seem very large and aggressive when he first pokes his nose into the noble resolve of our hero, but he grows rapidly and soon we see our dealer in truth disrupting the domestic relations of his partner. In fact, Trouble works overtime, and reputations that have been unblemished are smirched. Situations that are absurd and complications almost knotted, pile up, all credited to Truth, and the result of the wager to foster and cherish that great virtue from the lips of the man who has espoused the cause of truth to win a wager.

It is a novel idea and so well has it been worked out that an audience is kept in throes of laughter at the seemingly impossible task to untangle snarls into which our hero has involved all those he comes into contact with. It is a clean bright farce of well drawn characters and was built for laughing purposes only.

William Collier played "Nothing But the Truth" for a year at the Longacre Theatre, New York, and it has been on tour for over two seasons.

After three years continuous success on the professional stage we are now offering "Nothing But the Truth" for amateur production. It is one of the funniest and brightest farces ever written, and it is admirably suited to amateur production.

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